SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)
WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC)
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING – April 26, 2006
John Boy Auditorium, 1200 W.C. Owen Road
Clewiston, FL
9:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.
MEETING REPORT

This is a summary of the May 31 WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee meeting.

INTRODUCTION:

- Committee Chair and SFWMD Governing Board member Malcolm "Bubba" Wade called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.
- Presentations/Updates:
  - Status of Water Conditions in Lake Okeechobee
  - Compartmentalization of the Lake into two or three compartments
  - "WSE" Water Level Regulation Schedule Study
- The committee continued work on draft recommendations and agreed to more changes in the Goal and Objective statements.
- The lake water level was 12.7' on 5/31/06.
- Lake Okeechobee Committee presentations will be posted to http://www.my.sfwmd.gov/wrac.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION BY COMMITTEE:

- **Member Issues:**
- Committee members discussed:
  - Summary of Field Trip on 5/30/06 from Maryann and Roland Martin Marina in Clewiston to Coot Bay, the Dynamite Hole, and the East and West Walls (south central portion of lake). There are encouraging signs of recovery (apple snail eggs, some clear water areas during calm conditions, etc.) but the lake still has significant turbidity.
  - St. Lucie estuary has good salinities now, but oysters and seagrasses are gone. Recovery of those species will require several years.
  - The Caloosahatchee estuary is in same condition: salinities are good, buy have a red drift algae bloom. There is also a brown algae growing on the artificial reefs. There are still too high levels of nutrients in the estuary.
  - Water shortages: more users using more water. Need to consider increasing demand for water as we discuss recommendations.
  - Lake has 150 square miles of marsh. We need to figure out how to enhance marsh recovery because the marshes will help naturally clean up lake water. If lake levels drop enough, SFWMD needs to continue to control torpedo grass.

- Corps of Engineers needs to include the public at Lake Okeechobee Project Delivery Team meetings.
- Need to determine now how aquatic weed control impacts ecology of the lake before native submerged aquatic vegetation starts recovering. We need to have the spray meeting that was canceled before Hurricane Wilma.
- Need to do extensive dredging. It would clean up water and remove sediment. The lake has too many masters. Cities on the coast need to go to alternative water supplies because rising population growth will put too much strain on the lake.
- May need to filter vs. dredge bottom sediments in some places because the sediment layer is very thin and subject to being easily stirred up.

Compartmentalization Idea: The committee agreed that this concept should be included in the strategies and remain in the draft recommendations paper for further discussion.

Committee Comments:

- If compartment structures would be designated as a dam, would still need sufficient conveyance capacity out of the lake to protect the integrity of the "dam" (or levees).
- Would be better to have "levee" designation remain, do the necessary fixes.
- The two-compartment concept is interesting, assuming same beginning water quality in each. One could be used as a filter.
- Concept is interesting but need more information on need to increase water storage.
- Discussion of this concept is confusing at this point. Are we listing alternatives that are 5-10 year projects to be accomplished within existing resources?
- Strategies listed need to be critiqued; however all options are on the table. In 1993, during formulation of the C&SF Restudy, chemical treatment plants were discussed. Dollar and environmental costs were thought to be high and it was very controversial but now could be a possible alternative.

DRAFT Recommendations Paper: The committee agreed to provide comments to staff prior to the June 28 meeting in Stuart. Comments will be compiled and sent to committee members in sufficient time to review for discussion at the July 26 meeting in Belle Glade.

"WSE" Water Level Regulation Schedule Update: Pete Milam, Project Manger, US Army Corps of Engineers indicated that the date for selection of a "Tentatively Selected Plan" for WSE Schedule revisions has been postponed. Additional modeling will be done to study the impact of a 17.25' maximum discharge trigger as a constraint

in the schedule. Currently the maximum discharge level is 18.25'. The Corps will prepare a revised plan for completing the additional modeling and proposing a Tentatively Selected Plan as soon as possible (should be ready by June 8 full WRAC meeting).

Committee Questions and Comments:

- Question about whether Corps met with Martin County staff about the WSE Schedule revisions.
- Questions about amount and timing of routing lake water to Stormwater Treatment Area 3-4. STA 3-4 has gone to full load in as little as 2-3 weeks.
- Need presentation on STA 3-4 purpose, capacity, etc.
- Do any WSE Schedule Revision alternatives drop out because of the 17.25' trigger? Yes – Alternatives 1a/S2 and 1b/S2
- Alternative 1aS2 was the only alternative beneficial to relieve high discharges to the estuaries.
- Is integrity of the Hoover Dike the highest priorityi?
- Until the dike is fixed, the Corps could lower the top of the schedule, thereby reducing lake levels.
- Series of questions and comments about impacts on water supply, the SFWMD work on a Supply Side Management Plan, the Corps modeling of the Supply Side Mgt. Plan targets.
- Re: Hoover Dike - what about minimum flows and levels for the lake? It can take months to move 1' of water out of the lake when inflows are continually pouring in more water. Evacuation orders will disrupt the lake communities.
- Each reach has its own designs but the Corps could more rapidly complete repairs with more funding from Congress.
- Counties, SFWMD, State Div. of Emergency Management are working on specific criteria and timing for issuance of evacuation orders.
- Corps is receiving $19 million this year for dike repair and $39 million next year. Could take 20 years to complete at that level of funding.

Summary of Public Comment:

- For 20 to 25 years experts have been discussing lake water quality. Why continue spraying for aquatic plants if it causes problems? With all the engineers and technicians it is time to figure out a different approach that does not cause negative impacts.
- Removal of phosphorous laden sediment should be a top priority for lake restoration.
- Important to note that the littoral zone of the lake is impacted at 11'. The littoral zone marshes help filter and cleanup the lake water.
- Disappointed the Corps is delaying selection of the Tentatively Selected Plan.